

24th. ICM, Nov. 1, 2. 1959

WORK CAMPS FOR PEACE BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

INTRODUCTION

Henri Majewski as chairman, gave a brief review of the contacts made with the East European countries, since 1952, by the French branch, acting on behalf of the International Committee, At least, in 1955, an East-West camp had taken place in Warsaw, at the time of the World Youth Festival there. In 1956, volunteers from the USSR, Poland and Hungary took part in camps in France. In 1957, there was a marked progress in relations, and a good camp was held in Czempin, near Poznan, in co-operation with the ZMW (Association of Rural Youth). In 1958. 3 camps were held in Poland : 2 in Cisna, (south-east Poland) with the ZMW, and 1 in Cracow with the ZSP (Students' organisation). In 1959, only one camp took place - at Pulawy, on the Vistula south of Warsaw - with the ZMW. Volunteers from Poland and Bulgaria came to France. Both SCI and ZMW regretted that it had not been possible to organise more camps in 1959, but are planning to hold more in 1960 in Poland.

MEETING ON WORK CAMPS AT VIENNA FESTIVAL

Chris Hollaender then gave the first report of the afternoon, namely that on the meeting about international voluntary work camps held at Vienna in the framework of the World Youth Festival. He found the meeting to be very positive, with general agreement on the value work camps as a way to peace. Waclaw Wygeledowski, representative of the ZMW, agreed to be chairman, and he stressed the importance of working together as an effective method for understanding other people better. The delegate from the USSR spoke favourably of last year's camp in his country, and of international work camps as being a very good way to work for peace. Other representatives at the meeting described the value of large-scale national work camps. All delegates to the meeting were agreed, in conclusion, that international work camps are valuable for peace and understanding among people, though the emphasis given to particular aspects of international camps would vary from one situation to another. Work camps, they felt, are real contribution to peace, and more should be held.

Regarding SCI's relationship to the Festival, Chris regretted that SCI had limited its participation to the work camp meeting, and attendance at other activities as observers only. He felt that by not being representatives at the Festival, he and Henri Majewski had to miss opportunities to talk about SCI with many people. For instance they did not have their meals with Festival representatives and did not stay the whole period. They also inevitably felt and were regarded somewhat as outsiders, which to a certain extent hampered easy contacts. Moreover, Chris felt that the Festivals had changed in character. If, in the past, they had had a marked political bias, he did not feel that was the case now. Emphasis was placed on the magnificent artistic contributions coming from all parts of the world. He did not think SCI risked being thought a political organisation if it sent representatives to the Festival. It would, in any case, be possible to send representatives from SCI in a national delegation, without sending an SCI delegation. The Festival was a great occasion for giving and taking, that is, for exchanging views.

WORK CAMPS IN POLAND

Waclaw Wygeledowski opened his talk by thanking the French and International secretariats for their invitation to the SCI meetings. He spoke of the camp at Pulawy this summer and said there had not been time to prepare more camps because of the time needed for the World Youth Festival preparations. He emphasized that his organisation appreciated the work in Poland as well as the opportunity for Polish volunteers to work in similar camps in other countries. He found the work camp method an excellent one for people to get to know each other and get rid of false ideas about each other. In other words, they are a real contribution to peace. The work done in Poland, he said, had been useful and very much needed at the time - the harvesting 1957, road-building in 1958 and school building in 1959. With regard to the last camp (this summer), it was important to have the school ready before the school term started.

There were good and friendly contacts with the people of Pulawy and the local authorities. People were impressed that the work campers had come from so far away and worked without payment. There had also been visits to local factories, and so on, during the camp.

Wacław Wygledowski then spoke of what he personally felt to be a problem for the volunteers. They are usually young people without money, and many will only have an opportunity once in their lifetime to go to a foreign country. He therefore felt that provision should be made after the camp for the volunteers to see something of the country they have been working in. This was done in Poland for the foreign volunteers and he would like this to be done more for the Poles going abroad. The expenses could be kept as low as possible.

In concluding, he said that they wish to have more camps in Poland next year, and send more Poles abroad, in so far as the financial situation permits. He also referred to the interest and support of the WFDY in work camps and their wish to support them more in the future. Finally he expressed the hope that some of the international representatives of SCI present would come to the work camps in Poland next year, and conveyed his best wishes for SCI's work generally.

WORK CAMP IN THE USSR

Odette Eyssautier described last year's camp in the USSR in which she had been a participant - the overwhelming welcome given the volunteers on arrival, the interesting work (harvesting and building a youth club), the freedom to visit the villagers and go where one liked. She found accommodation for the volunteers too good and felt ill at ease to be living in conditions so luxurious compared with those of usual work camp. She also felt there was too much on the programme outside the work hours and would have liked some time to relax. She considered, however, that the differences between this camp and others she had attended (over-organised programme, not taking meals together, etc.) were not nearly as important as the things that were the same - work, discussions, etc. In appreciating this camp, we should understand, she said, the different relation which exists between youth organisations and their governments. In the USSR, they are closely identified with government policy, considering the government to reflect the aims and will of the people. On the Soviet side, Odette said it was hard for them to understand SCI's aim to help other people through voluntary aid, for they considered this to be a duty of the State. Finally she expressed the firm opinion that we should continue to cooperate with the Soviet Youth organisation in this way, for such camps have a special usefulness in bringing together people of different political opinions. She also felt that the pattern of the camp must respond to what young people of the USSR need, that we have not to impose a pattern that does not fit in their circumstances. She believed that such camps would continue, for both sides had experienced their usefulness.

CO-OPERATION WITH THE WFDY

Leo Lorenzi, of the World Federation of Democratic Youth, was the next speaker. After expressing thanks for the invitation, he said that his presence at this meeting represented the good relations existing for several years between the WFDY and the SCI. He said that the WFDY is not an ideological unit, but had within its federation organisations from East and West. It is a mistake that many people make to think that the WFDY represents only young people from the East.

The WFDY does not have the same concept of work as SCI, but what is important is that the two organisations want to develop peace and understanding between young people. There has already been good co-operation and they want this co-operation to continue. They will endeavour to promote it also between their member organisations and SCI. In questions of work camps, the WFDY looks to SCI for advice and co-operation. In the common cause of peace and friendship, he wished success to SCI.

MESSAGE FROM COMMITTEE OF SOVIET YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

Dorothy Guiborat said that a Vice-president of the Soviet Youth Organisations' Committee had sent cordial thanks for the invitation to the SCI meetings, but regretted not being able to accept as they would have needed longer notice in order to do so. They asked for the material on the meetings and sent their best wishes for our work.

(59 11 09 - 2 03)

DISCUSSION

In the discussion that followed, Johan Wijne asked about the preparation of volunteers for the USSR camp, and whether this effected the pattern of the camp. Odette replied that she thought in any case that the camp should fit into the structure and pattern of the country where it is held, but that it is important for the volunteers going to a new country to know more of the historical and social background than did most of the volunteers who went to the USSR. Members of the meeting agreed that there should be a short orientation course for volunteers from the West before the next camp. Regarding the affair of the telegram, said Odette in answer to another question, she felt that too much importance had been given to it after the camp. She said that when the SCI group was asked to sign the telegram, they decided to hold a small meeting on their own to decide what they should do. Some decided not to sign it, while others felt the unity of the camp more important and did sign it. They agreed that each SCI member should do as he or she wished, but on condition that it was made clear that the telegram came out from individuals and not from the SCI group, and secondly that the wording be prepared by all 3 leaders of the 3 organisations in the camp. The only thing she disliked in the way things were done was the taking of photos at the time of the signing, which gave the impression that propaganda would be made out of it. Heinrich Carstens pleaded that the members of the meeting use their imaginations and try to understand different approaches. He wanted to say, however, that the kind of propaganda put out by the Soviet Embassy in Germany was too one-sided, and that tended to make people disbelieve everything they heard coming from the USSR. Odette said she had the impression that all our Embassies do this kind of thing.

Ulla Tenenbaum asked the International Committee to give full support to the friends in West Germany who wished to have a work camp in East Germany. She felt it important that we try to remove some of the prejudices and strong suspicions of one side for the other.

Dorothy Guiborat said, regarding the Polish and other East European volunteers coming to West Europe, that she too felt it important that they see more of the country where they work than just the work camp, and that all the branches should realize there is quite a lot of extra work involved in 1) helping to get the visas through, and 2) planning post-camp visits to places of social and cultural interest, for currency problems make it difficult for Easterners to have money outside of their own country and hence they cannot make their own arrangements.

John Harvey, while agreeing with much that had been said, felt we must be clear on the points where we disagree as well as on those where we agree. We must recognize and understand our differences.

Tino Cirelli was glad to hear about the valuable human relations established in the camps, but would like to hear what people thought of the value of the work. In Yugoslavia, for instance, he had gathered that only big work brigades were felt to be useful. Waclaw Wygledowski said that at the Vienna meeting there were some representatives who felt only the big camps are effective. But it was generally agreed that the small international work camps also have an important role to play. Both can exist side by side. Hans-Peter Müller said that on a recent visit to Yugoslavia he had been told that small international brigades can very well fit into the big Work Drives. There were in fact a large number of small (national) camps in the villages, and at the next Co-ordination Committee conference, which will be held in Yugoslavia, there may be discussion on these small camps becoming international.

Inge Sletten-Fosstvedt said she happened to be in Vienna at the time of the World Youth Festival and as she watched the colourful processions from the different countries go by, it was as though the whole world was before her. She would be strongly in favour of SCI participating in the next Festival. Odette said we should not overlook the fact that in SCI the contacts, through working together, are deeper.

The closing words were spoken by Waclaw Wygledowski who expressed appreciation and pleasure at being able to participate in the day's meetings. Work camps were undoubtedly a good means of understanding between East and West and a way to peace. They should be developed more and more. Though we sometimes have different opinions, we should look for the things that unite us, in the interests of friendship and peace

* * * * *